

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOP MOVEMENTS IN QUANG TRI
AND THUA THIEN PROVINCES: AUGUST 1968 TO
FEBRUARY 1969

The Facts

1. At the beginning of August 1968, a total of 22 NVA regiments were located in or targeted directly against the two northernmost provinces of South Vietnam -- Quang Tri and Thua Thien.* Eighteen of these were infantry regiments and four were artillery regiments.**

2. By the end of October 1968, ten of these 22 regiments had moved out of the combat areas in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces and returned to North Vietnam. In effect, three whole NVA Divisions (the 308th, 320th and 324B) left the area with their nine infantry regiments, and one additional infantry regiment also departed. Still remaining in the two provinces were 12 NVA regiments (eight infantry and four artillery regiments).

3. By the end of February 1969, the count of NVA regiments in these two provinces had increased by two -- to 14. The additional regiments were one of the three regiments of the NVA 324B Division, and the 38th Artillery Regiment. Shortly after the end of February, the

*We have included in this tally those NVA artillery units whose headquarters were located in the DMZ or directly north of the DMZ, but which were actively providing artillery support to infantry units in combat south of the DMZ. We have also included several infantry units whose battalions were fighting in South Vietnam, although their headquarters were in the DMZ area or just over the border to the north.

**There is some evidence concerning an additional artillery regiment, the 208th, but the evidence on this regiment's existence is tenuous.

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other two regiments of the 324B Division also moved back into northern South Vietnam. Between October 1968 and February 1969, several other NVA regiments had been rotated in or out of the two provinces, or replaced by other units, but the overall number of regiments in the area remained the same.

4. The following table shows the number of enemy regiments located in or targeted against Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces as of the dates given:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Infantry Regiments</u>	<u>Number of Artillery Regiments</u>	<u>Total Regiments</u>
1 Aug 68	18	4	22
31 Oct 68	8	4	12
28 Feb 69	9	5	14

5. Appended to this memorandum is an Annex which lists all North Vietnamese regiments which were located in Quang Tri or Thua Thien provinces at the beginning of August 1968, and where these units were located each month thereafter through February 1969.

Comment

6. The large number of enemy units in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces in August 1968 reflects the fact that the North Vietnamese were just coming to the end of the third phase of their 1968 offensive efforts (which started with the Tet offensive on 30 January). The last round of major enemy action in that year occurred in August. Thereafter, the enemy did not initiate another major round of action, either in northern MR 1 or elsewhere, until late February and early March 1969. There is ample evidence that Communist units took heavy casualties in their offensives of 1968 -- the Tet, May, and August offensives -- and that most of their major units required a substantial period for rest and replacement between offensives. The third offensive in this series, that of August

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1968, met with minimal success because enemy units were in a weakened condition. Some captured documents and reports from prisoners of war at the time suggested that the Communists themselves considered their August offensive a failure. From the standpoint of demonstrated Communist military requirements to rest and refit their forces, it appeared reasonable at that time that a number of NVA units should have withdrawn from the battle areas to base sanctuaries.

7. It should also be pointed out, as the Table in paragraph 4 above indicates, that the withdrawals of NVA regiments from Quang Tri and Thua Thien in 1968 all occurred before October of that year. From late October through the end of January, the level of enemy troop strength remained roughly constant in the two northern provinces of South Vietnam.

8. In general, therefore, the evidence of observed troop movements strongly suggested that any attempt by North Vietnam to make political capital out of these moves was at least in part an effort to extract some virtue from military necessity. This view was expressed in CIA's response to Question V of NSSM 1 (written in early 1969), in which we indicated that the pull-back of forces might have been dictated by a combination of military and political factors, and that some of the withdrawals "were probably intended to encourage the U.S. to move forward at Paris on the bombing suspension issue."